



The Race for Global Superpower Status: Is the U.S. Losing Its Grip?

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Abstract

Following World War II, the United States emerged as a true global superpower, a position it continues to hold today. However, as every superpower throughout history, the United States has, and continues to encounter nations looking to challenge its position as the global leader. This paper explores and analyzes other nations or regions which are potential candidates to disrupt American hegemony. Factors in determining a country's candidacy will include economic power, military power, government stability, the size of territory and quality of life. These factors will be compared to those of the United States to identify challengers to the current American position. Ultimately, this paper will explore whether the United States' position as the lone global superpower is in jeopardy and by whom.

Keywords: Superpower, Economic Power, Military Might

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been much discussion as to whether the United States is losing hold of its position as the global superpower or hegemon. The issue was front and center during the last presidential election here in the U.S. Donald Trump's campaign was based on the theme that American doesn't win anymore, as well as his well know slogan, "Make America Great Again". This resonated with many Americans who feel that in fact, the U.S. doesn't win anymore, or is losing its hold as the lone global superpower. Furthermore, this mindset has created the beginning stages of what could be a lengthy trade war between the United States and China.

To determine whether a country can be categorized as a superpower, we cannot just look at one factor. A global superpower must demonstrate dominance in a variety of factors to include, the size of territory, natural resources, economic and military power, as well as scientific and technological prowess (Bhutto 2012). Political stability is also an important factor. A global superpower will demonstrate dominance in a combination of these factors (Bhutto 2012)

From the end of World War II until present, the United States has enjoyed a position of hegemony (Layne 2012). During its run, there were occasions where other countries challenged the United States' position, notably the Soviet Union, but the U.S. always prevailed. However, that may be changing. Bhutto (2012) claims that there are three contenders which could challenge the current U.S. position. These include Russia and China, as well as the European Union. Bhutto (2012) also claims that while Brazil and India control large territories, neither country is yet ready to contend as a global superpower.

While the European Union is not a country, but rather a political and economic union of 28 countries, for the sake of this argument it will be considered an entity with the potential of attaining the position of global superpower. The E.U. was founded in 1993 when the European Single Market system to promote free trade and

economic growth in the region (Sampson 2017). Today, however, the E.U. faces many challenges.

Russia exhibits some characteristics that could vault the country into the ranks of global superpower. The country controls vast areas of land which contain valuable raw materials (Aleksashenko 2012). The country also maintains a strong military, which could put up a fight with any competitor (Eberstadt 2011). However, Eberstadt (2011) also states that Russia has serious economic and demographic issues, which could hamper a rise to superpower status.

The elephant (or dragon) in the room involved in any discussion of the overthrow of American hegemony is China. The country is an economic powerhouse when measured by GDP, with a strong and growing military, as well as a unique but adaptable government (Li 2013). However, China does have struggles to include corruption, relatively low standards of life amongst its citizens, and an economy propped up by government intervention (Chang 2014).

While there are many thoughts and opinions on the current state of the U.S. as a superpower compared to these challenging nations, this paper will evaluate the merits of each country on a deeper level to determine the truth. After examining each challenger's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the United States', this study will determine whether or not the United States is losing its grip as the global superpower and if so, which country is most likely to take the wheel.

2. Literature Review

Bhutto (2012) defines what set of characteristics makes up a global superpower, as well as identifies which countries exhibit these characteristics, (the European Union, Russia, China and the United States). The first region explored in the analysis is the European Union. McKinsley Global Institute (2018) explores the strengths and weaknesses of the European Union economy. Simms (2012) highlights the political and military status in the European Union and discusses whether this status is enough to qualify the E.U. as a superpower. Valchev (2017) discusses the issue of government

legitimacy within the E.U. As the departure of Great Britain from the European Union will surely impact the E.U. economy, Philippon (2016) focuses on the negative economic impacts of Brexit and the political instability it created. Sampson (2017) examines what Brexit will mean for the European Union going forward. From there, Russia's potential to attain global superpower status will be analyzed. Weitz (2012) discusses the power of the Russian military. Alekshashenko (2012) details how Russia's economy is dependent upon oil and gas, as well as extraction of raw materials, while Laqueur (2015) explains that Russia is most likely at its peak economically. Eberstadt (2011) details the quality of life among Russian citizens, as well as Russia's ability to keep up with other superpowers. From there, Sultan, Bhatti and Shaheen (2011) argue that Russia is and always will remain a regional power in Central Asia, but not in the west, which is necessary to attain superpower status. And as it relates to regional power, Chang (2014) explores the relationship between Moscow and Beijing, notably how dependent Russia is on China and the Chinese economy.

The most formidable challenger to United States supremacy appears to be China. In fact, Subramanian (2011) makes a case that China as the lone global superpower is not only possible, but inevitable. Li (2013) agrees and argues that the Chinese government is quick to adapt to changing times and that the country's economic growth is sustainable. Schweller (2011) takes a slightly softer stance as he addresses the current state of China as a power and lays out a path for China to achieve multi-polarity with the United States. Chang (2014) and Bai, Hsieh, and Song (2016) take an entirely different stance. Chang (2014) argues that current Chinese leadership has created instability, while Bai, Hsieh, and Song (2016) address the growing debt China has utilized to artificially support growth. Both address slowing and unsustainable economic growth in China. Lee (2016) takes things a step further by providing evidence that China is losing ground as a global superpower to the United States, even in Asia. Ezrati (2018) explains that any trade war between the United States and China would negatively impact China more than the U.S. due to fundamental weaknesses in the Chinese economy. Economy (2014) discusses human rights and corruption issues in China and how they could impact China's ascent to global superpower status.

Of course, an analysis on whether the United States is losing its grip as a global superpower must also explore the current state of the United States. Layne (2012) makes an argument that the United States' era as a hegemon is ending, if it has not already. On the other hand, Beckley (2011/12) contends that at first blush it looks as if China is gaining on the U.S., but when the numbers are analyzed at a deeper level, the U.S. is continuing to separate itself from China economically. Rothkopf and Chase (2014) tend to agree. They claim that the United States is still and will continue to be the richest and the most powerful nation in the history of civilization.

An analysis of superpower status will be made for each the European Union, Russia, China, and the United States. After which, a conclusion will be made as to whether the United States is losing its grip as the global superpower. The first analysis will be conducted on the European Union.

3. The European Union Case

Many of the countries that make up the European Union have long, rich histories dating back centuries. However, the European Union as it is today, was only founded in 1993 (Sampson 2017). The E.U. was established by member nations to boost economic growth through encouraging free trade amongst members. The union essentially created a single market in the region by eliminating border barriers to trade, thus greatly reducing trade costs between members (Sampson 2017). Currently, citizens in many E.U. countries experience a very high quality of life. The E.U. has some of the highest quality education, healthcare, public safety, environmental standards, and work-life balance in the world

(McKinsley Global Institute 2018). For much of its history, the European Union's economy has grown at a similar rate to that of the United States. However, the past decade has been difficult. Following the financial crisis of 2008-09, Europe has struggled to recover. In fact, the E.U. economy endured a double-dip recession in 2012-13 (McKinsley Global Institute 2018). However, according to McKinsley Global Institute (2018), Europe is finally seeing recovery. In 2017, the E.U. saw its most robust GDP growth since before 2008. In fact, in 2017, the European Union commanded the 2nd largest economy in the world by GDP (PPP) according to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (2017), producing \$19.97T in goods and services.

Despite the strength of the economy, the European Union is not without problems. According to Simms (2012), the E.U. could be heading towards a collapse. The fact that the E.U. is comprised of many individual nations looking out for their own best interests has caused governance issues. When making political decisions, member nations are more likely to defend their own interests rather than consider the interests of other member nations (Valchev 2017). In terms of foreign policy, the E.U. struggles to agree on a unified position on various global issues and threats (Simms 2012). This lack of unification makes decision making on crucial issues within the E.U. government painstakingly slow (Valchev 2017). For example, it took the E.U. over a year to institute policy regarding the Syrian refugee crisis. Meanwhile, approximately one million immigrants gained entrance into E.U. countries. Valchev (2017) argues that a unified European government would have agreed upon policy in under a month, thus, curbing the flow of immigrants into the union as well as the social and political uproar that followed.

Differences in opinion and culture among E.U. countries are evident in international affairs which require military action (Valchev 2017). Each country within the union takes its own position on issues such as Iranian nuclear development, Russian expansion ambitions in the Ukraine, Middle-East conflict, and the ever-growing power of China. While some E.U. members, such as France and Great Britain, are willing to engage in military intervention in foreign conflict, countries such as Germany are unwilling and have the belief that "war is something we leave to the Americans" (Simms 2012). As such, the E.U. has never been able to form and organize a common, united military. Of course, a strong military is a large factor in being considered a global superpower. This fragmented government has created difficulties as the European Union tackles issues amongst its own member nations. During the Euro debt crisis, the E.U. once again failed to achieve full political unification. (Simms 2012). Sovereign debt issues in Ireland, Portugal, Italy, Spain, and most notably Greece tested the European common currency system. To make matters worse, it was found that the Greek government used inaccurate economic data to enter the E.U. On the brink of bankruptcy, the E.U. was forced to come up with a solution to keep the Greek nation afloat. Great debates occurred between E.U. member countries, with Germany ultimately shouldering a disproportionately large portion of the burden (Simms 2012).

The European Union government will once again be challenged to find a unified position as the Union struggles with potentially the largest crisis yet. On March 29, 2017, the United Kingdom, one of the largest E.U. economies, announced its intentions to separate from the E.U. (Sampson 2017). The Brexit, as it is being called, does not come at an ideal time for the E.U., as it is just gaining its footing again following the global financial crisis as well as struggling with geopolitical instability. Free movement of E.U. citizens between countries is at the heart of the Brexit vote (Philippon 2016). The United Kingdom saw a disproportionately large influx of immigrants from poorer E.U. nations as an E.U. member nation. Many U.K. citizens saw this as a matter of national security as well as drag on the U.K. welfare system. By leaving the European Union, the U.K. would no longer be held to the immigration requirements determined by the union (Sampson 2017). Instead the country could determine its own policy and restrict the flow of immigrants coming from the E.U. According to

Philippon (2016), European Union leaders have made it clear that the post-Brexit U.K. will not be granted access to the E.U. open market without also allowing free labor mobility. The Brexit vote could possibly threaten European Union democracy. The impact it will have on the European Union economy is uncertain. It appears as if the United Kingdom economy will be hit hard than the E.U., as the E.U. is the largest importer of British goods (Sampson 2017). However, most financial experts agree that it will likely be a drag on economic growth within the region (Philippon 2016). The other major concern is whether or not Brexit could start a domino effect. Some of the same protectionist ideologies that spurred on Brexit are bubbling up in other E.U. countries. The risk is very real that other member nations could vote to leave the Union, notably Germany or France (Sampson 2017). While the European Union project is a pillar of globalization, it is possible that a new era of protectionism has begun (Sampson 2017). While the European Union has a powerful economy and a high standard of life, it does not appear ready to challenge the United States as the global superpower. There are just too many uncertainties. The governing body is too fragmented to achieve greatness, especially as it relates to the military. The Brexit causes political and economic uncertainty, making it difficult for the E.U. to lay claim as a global superpower. However, just east of the European Union sits another powerful candidate, Russia.

4. The Russian Case

For much of the second half of the 20th century, the Soviet Union and the United States were fierce rivals jockeying for position as the global superpower (Bhutto 2012). However, over the past couple of decades the United States has separated itself from Russia on nearly all metrics. Russia still maintains status as a powerful nation and some believe it could again challenge the United States as the global superpower.

One of Russia's major strengths is its military might. As a country with nuclear capabilities, Russia commands the attention of all adversaries (Eberstadt 2011). As a matter of fact, many consider Russia to have the second most powerful military in the world (Weitz 2012). As a military power, China often relies on Russia to combat the initiatives of Western powers in the Middle-East, especially Iran and Syria. Russia maintains an army of over one million soldiers. However, due to a one-year mandatory conscription, the majority of soldiers are only 18 years of age and lack experience (Eberstadt 2011). Also, much of the technology and equipment used by the Russian military is antiquated compared to other global powers.

The Russian economy currently ranks 7th in the world, producing about \$4 trillion of goods measured by GDP (PPP). (Central Intelligence Agency 2017). However in recent years, the Russian economy has struggled to gain any momentum (Aleksashenko 2012). The Russian economy is highly dependent on the production of raw materials. In particular oil and gas, which accounts for two thirds of Russian exports and half of the government's revenues (Aleksashenko 2012). Furthermore, including oil and gas, 85% of Russian exports come from raw materials and commodities. With oil and gas prices remaining relatively muted and the possibility of alternative energies overtaking traditional, the Russian economy is struggling. While the economies of much of the developed world have turned towards globalization, Russian economy has remained relatively isolated (Aleksashenko 2012). Aleksashenko(2012) claims that in order for Russia to make any real strides economically, the country must open up its borders and economy to the rest of the world. Up until the early 2000's, Russia's economic policy was to become more integrated with the West, especially Europe (Laqueur 2015). That policy has fallen apart in recent years and Russia has once again isolated itself from the West. Rather, it has tied itself more and more to China (Chang 2014). Together, China and Russia are attempting to overthrow the American led international economic system. However, unfortunately for Russia,

the country still maintains a strong financial dependence on western countries (Laqueur 2015). Also, China does not see Russia as equal and most likely neither countries care about little more than its own self interests. Chang (2015) claims that the partnership is only skin deep and neither country really trust the other. China may just be looking for a cheap source of oil and gas. Laqueur (2015) argues that based on its dependence on raw materials, notably oil and gas, and government policy, Russia is most likely at its peak economically and the future will likely see decline. Russian economic expert, Vladislav Inozemtsev, states that Russia is not and cannot become a global superpower so long as it imports much of the necessary goods to survive (Laqueur 2015).

Quality of life in Russia does not appear up to the standards one would expect from a global superpower. Healthcare in Russia is notably poor (Eberstadt 2011). Despite the global advances in healthcare and medicine, life expectancy in Russia actually declined by two years between 1959 and 2009. The life expectancy at age 15 in Russia is lower than many third world countries to include: Bangladesh, Madagascar, Niger and Yemen (Eberstadt 2011). The mortality crisis saw the population of Russia decline 5% from 148.6 million in 1993 to 141.9 million in 2010. The trend is expected to continue into the foreseeable future.

On the surface it appears as if Russia offers its citizens the education one would expect of a global superpower. In 2003, Russia joined the European education reform process (Galina & Pykko 2012). Prior to joining the reform process, higher education in Russia was primarily reserved for elites. Following 2003, higher education in Russia became much more accessible to the general population (Galina & Pykko 2012). The proportion of Russian adults earning a postsecondary degree is at par with or higher than any other developed country in the world, 30% higher than the OECD average. (Eberstadt 2011). However, the quality of education in Russia is quite poor. While the number of students dramatically increased following the 2003 reform, the government did not provide additional resources (Galina & Pykko 2012). The education system severely lacked quality instructors and teaching tools. As a result, the quality of the Russian higher education system deteriorated significantly (Galina & Pykko 2012). While Russia lays claim to 6% of the world's postsecondary education graduates, the country only accounts for less than 0.2 percent of patents granted by the UN's World Intellectual Property Organization (Eberstadt 2011). This shows that while the Russian population appears to be well educated, it is not translating to advancements in the country's technologies. Given this lack of innovation, it is not hard to see why the Russian economy produces little more than raw material and the Russian military equipment is outdated.

It is tough to talk about the quality of life in Russia without addressing corruption. The country is fraught with political corruption and lacks democratic freedom (Aleksashenko 2012). A spike in corruption and racketeering by government officials has been observed by Russians. Nepotism and crony capitalism are commonplace in the Russian government. It is not uncommon for the Russian government to commandeer control of private business and property, which is a major deterrent for foreign investors to invest in the country. All of which creates a major headwind for the growth of the Russian economy (Aleksashenko 2012). Unfortunately, it does not appear as if any sort of political reform is on the horizon.

At this time, it does not appear as if Russia can lay any real claim as a hegemon. An economy based entirely on one industry, poor quality of life, lack of innovation, and corruption are holding the country back. It is, however, a strong regional power in Central Asia. Russia's economy and military power are far above the other countries in the region (Bhatty, Shaheen and Sultan 2011). In fact, the region relies heavily on Russia and its military for protection from outside aggressors. Russia is also a large influencer on the political and economic development within Central Asian countries. So, while not a global superpower, Russia is important, powerful, and influential in its region (Bhatty, Shaheen and Sultan 2011). While it does not appear as if Russia can command the status

of global superpower, it is possible that its neighbor to the south, China, could.

5. The Chinese Case

Of all the contenders, China is the most likely to challenge the United States as a global superpower. The country is home to the world's largest economy. According to the Central Intelligence Agency (2017), China produces \$23.12 trillion in GDP (PPP). Unlike Russia, China is an export heavy economy dependent on the manufacturing industry (Ezrati 2018). Chinese GDP is expected to grow at a 7% clip for the near future. A far cry from the 11% it achieved over the last decade, but still significantly higher than the 2.5% growth the United States has achieved over the past three decades (Subramanian 2011). Growth in the Chinese economy, however, is directly tied to economic growth in the United States and Europe, as these countries consume much of the Chinese exports (Ezrati 2018). Two-thirds of all Chinese exports end up in North America and Europe (Lee 2016). Because of this dependence, it appears as if any extended trade war between the United States and China would favor the United States.

As a communist nation, the Chinese government is quick to take actions to prop up the Chinese economy. During the global financial crisis in 2008, the Chinese government enacted a \$486 billion stimulus plan (Chang 2014). As time went on, the stimulus plan expanded, and the Chinese government successfully nationalized a large portion of the economy. This only gave an already strong government even more power. Local governments, under pressure from the national government to manufacture growth, took "free money" and built "ghost cities" (Chang 2014). Airports, roads, and high rises were all constructed for the sole purpose of stimulating economic growth. At this point they are going unused or in some cases, minimally used. Chang (2014) argues that for each dollar spent by the Chinese government to fuel the economy, only ten cents of output is generated. Chang (2014) claims that the inefficient use of capital will most likely prevent the Chinese government from achieving the expected 7% annual GDP. Li (2013) disagrees, claiming that the communist government has shown a resilience and ability to adapt to changing times.

Of course, all this frivolous stimulus spending has added a large amount of debt to the balance sheet of the Chinese government. Lee (2016) points out that between 2008 and 2015, Chinese debt grew at a rate never seen in economic history. In the eight-year span, Chinese debt grew from \$3 trillion to a whopping \$34 trillion. While carrying such a large load of debt is not likely sustainable in the long run, it has helped China accomplish its goal of keeping Chinese exports affordable around the world by devaluing the Chinese Yuan (Lee 2016). However, this devaluation has dissuaded foreign investment in the country. Lee (2016) states that in the coming decade, China will be forced to de-lever its economy. This will most likely be painful and hamper the growth of the Chinese economy.

From a quality of life perspective, the Chinese are lacking. Chang (2014) claims that today's corruption among Chinese government officials is the worst in over 25 years and likely the worst in Chinese history. As of 2013, China ranked 75th in the world by Transparency International in global corruption (Li 2013). As mentioned previously, the Chinese government has taken control of much of the economy. This is a trend that is expected to continue as the communist government continues to consolidate power within the one-party system (Li 2013). This continued consolidation will most likely allow cronyism to continue to run rampant. Many party leaders have accumulated large commercial interests by utilizing political influence. Because of the government's intervention in the economy, in 2013 the World Bank ranked China 151st in the world in terms of the "the ease of starting a business" (Bai, Hseih, and Song 2016). Ahead of China were countries such as Congo, Iran, Pakistan, and Syria. The corrupt government has also dissuaded multinational corporations from

investing in the country. The government is known to give multinational businesses operating in the country a hard time for issues that are largely ignored when committed by Chinese companies (Economy 2014).

Chinese citizens live under the constant eye and thumb of the communist party. The government spends more capital monitoring Chinese citizens for internal security purposes than it does on national defense. The government is known to monitor online postings and even text messages between citizens (Chang 2014). In 2013, China tied with Cuba to rank 58th out of 60 countries in a study by Freedom House on internet freedom (Economy 2014). The only country more restrictive was Iran. It is common for popular bloggers to be arrested, detained, or publicly shamed for voicing anti-communist ideals or criticizing Chinese President Xi Jinping (Economy 2014). Under new internet regulations put into place by Xi, it is punishable for up to three years in prison for any post that the Chinese government determines to be rumor and viewed by more than 5,000 people or shared 500 times. President Xi, to consolidate power, has employed brutal tactics against his adversaries (Chang 2014). Under the guise of a crackdown on corruption, the communist party has accelerated the jailing of politicians who voice opposition to the status quo. Following thirty plus years of government stability and progress, many in China fear the government is returning to the brutal communist party of the past which rules with an iron fist (Chang 2014). Some see this shift as a sign that public support for the communist party is dwindling amongst Chinese citizens. The increased censorship is an attempt by the party to protect itself from revolution (Chang 2014).

Corruption and censorship can also be found in the Chinese education system. The communist government has banned the study of several topics (Economy 2014). Students are banned from studying matters pertaining to the following: universal values, civil society, citizens' rights, freedom of the press, mistakes by the communist party, benefits of capitalism, and independent judicial systems (Economy 2014). This censorship has negatively impacted China. It is estimated that 85% of Chinese citizens with children who are worth more than \$1 million want their children educated overseas. 65% of Chinese citizens who are worth more than \$1.6 million have plans to or have already emigrated from the country (Economy 2014). As the country's most intelligent and talented leave to provide their services overseas, damage is made to the Chinese society, its technological advancement.

As mentioned in the European Union and Russian cases, military power is a major deciding factor in whether a country has achieved superpower status. China, like Russia, is a country with nuclear capabilities (Schweller 2011). The Chinese military, to this point, has remained neutral and on the sidelines in conflicts of international importance (Schweller 2011). As such, China has done a poor job of projecting power upon other nations, something that is typically expected of the global superpower. It appears that China wants the benefits of power and globalization, without taking on any of the responsibilities required of a superpower (Schweller 2011).

However, China has become more aggressive within its region in pursuit of its self-serving interests in recent years (Lee 2016). As China pursues increasingly of its individual interests, it is likely to come head to head with the United States as the two country's interests converge; potentially in the South China Sea, as China tries to expand its territory while the United States defends international waters which allow free trade to flow. Schweller (2011) does note, however, that the prospects of an all-out military conflict between the two countries is unlikely due to the threat of nuclear arms destruction. A war would also put the economic benefits of trade between two of the world's largest economies at risk.

While the Chinese military might still fall short of the United States and Russia, the country has been rapidly allocating capital towards its military (Beckley 2011/12). The capital allocated to the Chinese military doubled from 1989-1994, again from 1994-1999, and once again from 2005-2009. Since taking office in 2013, President Xi has

made strengthening of the Chinese military a priority (Page 2018). His goal of making the Chinese navy the most powerful in the world is well underway. The Chinese navy currently commands the world's largest fleet of ships (Page 2018). However, the Chinese navy still lacks the technology of the United States' Navy. For example, while the United States has many aircraft carriers, China only commands one. A hurdle for the Chinese military is defending its own borders. China shares borders with nineteen countries and has been at war with five of them in the last century (Beckley 2011/12). China uses a large portion of its military expenditures just to guard this border, including 300,000 soldiers from the Chinese army.

Government corruption and inefficiencies again rear their ugly head as it relates to the Chinese military. The Chinese military does not get nearly the "bang for its buck" on each dollar spent as do other countries, namely the United States (Beckley 2011/12). While the Chinese military has nuclear warfare technologies and has made building its military might a priority, it appears as if it is not quite up to the standards one would expect from a global superpower. Up to this point, it appears as if China is the most likely candidate to wear the global superpower crown. The country commands the world's largest economy and a government that appears determined to facilitate and fuel future growth. However, China's status as a hegemon cannot be determined until the incumbent global superpower, the United States, is analyzed.

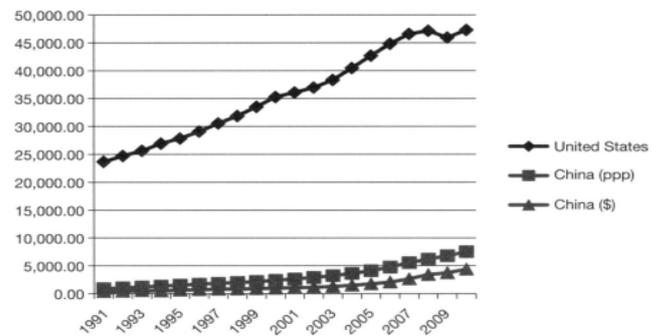
6. The Incumbent

It is generally acknowledged that now the United States remains a hegemon, or the lone global superpower. However, there are plenty of arguments as to whether the United States is losing its grip, primarily to China. Layne (2012) makes a case that the United States is losing ground to China and that the period of United States unipolarity is over. He states that the Financial Crisis of 2008/09 raised doubts about the United States' economy and its financial system. At this time, global wealth and power shifted from western powers to eastern powers. A global hegemon is supposed to prevent and cushion global crises rather than cause them (Layne 2012). Under a market economy system, like that of the United States, inability to service debt creates market disruptions, recessions, and economic failures (Ezrati 2018). Under the Chinese system, the government controls much of the economic debt. Debt becomes less of an issue under this system because the government can implement slow adjustments to cushion the type of crash that occurred in western economies (Ezrati 2018). In the years following the Financial Crisis, the United States economy would slip from the largest in the world to its current place, 3rd, behind China and the European Union with production of \$19.36 trillion as measured by 2017 GDP (PPP) (Central Intelligence Agency 2017). In 2010, China had already stripped the United States of the title it had held for over one hundred years as the world's largest manufacturer of goods (Layne 2012). Layne (2012) states that the rapidly growing national debt will cause the United States dollar to lose global currency reserve status. Once this happens, he claims, the United States will not be able to fund military initiatives. At this point, the Chinese military will close the gap and likely become more powerful than the United States military.

Beckley (2011/12) and Lee (2016) take a different stance. They believe the United States will remain the global hegemon for the foreseeable future. The United States is more technologically advanced and powerful, with respect to China, than it was in the early 1990's (Beckley 2011/12). While China has overtaken the United States in terms of GDP, GDP may not tell the whole story. Foreign firms with operations in China are responsible for over 90% of the country's high-tech exports. This means that much of the profits from these revenues are trickling back to western powers, to include the United States (Beckley 2011/12). On top of that, maintaining a market to consume other nations' goods makes a country more valuable to others than a net exporter (Lee 2016).

Even in China's own backyard, Asia, the United States is likely more economically powerful than China. The United States purchases \$12 trillion of Asian products, while China consumes less than \$4 trillion (Lee 2016). GDP per capita also merits study. Wealthier nations tend to project more power than do poorer nations. From the time period between 1991 and 2010, despite lagging in GDP growth, the average United States citizen has become \$17,000 richer compared to the average Chinese citizen over that time period (Beckley 2011/12). See the chart below.

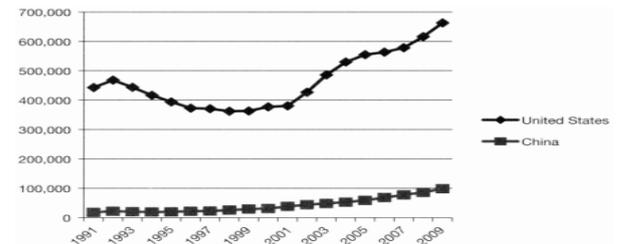
Figure 1. Per Capita Income, 1991–2010 (\$ in current prices)



SOURCE: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, October 2010. PPP stands for purchasing power parity.

Beckley (2011/12) also exhibits evidence that while China is focusing on strengthening its military, it is still losing ground to the United States. The United States annually spends almost seven times more on its military than does China. No country spends more on its military than America. In fact, the United States spends as much on its military as do the next ten countries (ranked by military expenditures) combined (Rothkopf 2014). Due to the technological and economical superiority of the United States to China, each dollar spent on the U.S. military produces more force than does that same dollar spent on the Chinese military, making the gap between China and America even more pronounced (Beckley 2011/12).

Figure 11. Military Spending, 1988–2009 (current \$, millions)



SOURCE: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Military Expenditure Database.

In a study conducted at the beginning of the decade, thirty military experts in an independent task force studied and compared the Chinese and American militaries (Beckley 2011/12). The overwhelming conclusion was that not only is China not a peer to the United States military, it is highly unlikely to attain that status in the near future. Lee (2016) again takes things a step further and claims that the United States military is more important in China's own backyard than is the Chinese military. As China becomes more aggressive in pursuing its ambitions, much of the Asian world relies on the United States for protection. Both Korea and Japan have relied on the United States for protection for years. However, now many countries, which have been leery of opening their shores to American troops and ships, have shifted their mindsets. In recent years, the Philippines, Vietnam, Burma, Singapore, and Malaysia have all tightened ties or welcomed American troops on their shores (Lee 2016). In the region, only Thailand and North Korea have aligned themselves more closely with China. It appears as if Asian countries have come to realize America's importance in the region and that without an American presence, the balance of power shifts toward China.

After analysis, it is not difficult to see why the United States has held the title of global superpower for decades. However, it is apparent that some countries are challenging the United States for that position. After analyzing the European Union, Russia, China, and the United States, it is now possible to compare the merits of each as a global superpower.

7. Discussion

A global superpower must demonstrate dominance in a variety of factors to include, size of territory, natural resources, economic and military power, as well as scientific and technological prowess (Bhutto 2012). Political stability and quality of life must also be considered. It is not sufficient to excel in just one of these areas, a global superpower must dominate across the spectrum.

From an economic standpoint, the European Union, China, and the United States all exhibit the type of power one would expect of a global superpower as they make up the three largest economies in the world. Russia does not exhibit the economic capabilities of a superpower. While the country has an abundance of natural resources, it does not produce much else and relies heavily on imports to survive.

As it relates to military, both the United States and Russia display the might one would expect of a global superpower. Both nations are nuclear powers with large, powerful militaries. The United States and Russia have proven a willingness to project power through shows of force. However, when considering military spending and technological advantages, the United States military is head and shoulders above that of the Russians. The European Union appears too fragmented and indecisive to be considered a military superpower. The E.U. has not proven an ability to inflict a unified projection of power upon other regions. China, while possessing a large military with nuclear capabilities, is not quite up to the standards of a superpower. Inefficient spending and technology has hampered China's ability to build a world class military. The country has not proven a willingness or ability to project power outside of Asia. However, it appears as if China has strong ambitions to improve in this area.

Political stability is an important characteristic of a global superpower. The United States lays claim to the most stable government system of all the contending superpowers. The American government, for the most part, allows business to be conducted freely, only intervening when necessary (Rothkopf and Chase 2014). A system of checks and balances keeps any one branch of government from becoming too powerful. The European Union political scene remains too unpredictable to be considered a superpower. The government is indecisive and slow to make decisions. The E.U. may become even more unstable in years to come as it manages through Brexit and any other nations which may decide to withdraw from the union. Russia is known for political instability and corruption. This does not appear likely to change soon. In China, the communist party maintains strong control of the country and its citizens. However, the country is fraught with corruption and there are signs that the Chinese people are unhappy with the current state of the government.

A global superpower must maintain a high quality of life for its citizens. A quality of life that makes citizens of other countries envious. Both the United States and the European Union offer their citizens a quality of life expected of a global superpower. United States citizens are among the richest in the world, with civil liberties, and a system of higher education that is second to none (Rothkopf & Chase 2014). Citizens of the E.U. also enjoy world class education, as well as high quality healthcare and public safety. Quality of life in Russia can be considered poor. Due to the country's poor healthcare system, Russian citizens have the life expectancy comparable to those of third world countries. Education, while abundant, is of poor quality. To top it off, Russian citizens are subject to high levels of corruption. Chinese citizens are also subject to high levels of corruption, as well as strict censorship.

The education system is not great and Chinese citizens do not enjoy the wealth expected of a superpower.

The chart below demonstrates whether each country achieves the standards one would expect of a global superpower in each category. Per this chart, the United States appears to be the most dominant candidate across the board. However, it doesn't tell the whole story. The chart measures current status and is not forward looking. While China does not appear competitive in the chart below, the country is quickly making improvements, notably in military power and the wealth of its citizens, which would be reflected in quality of life (Subramanian 2011).

| Analysis of Potential Global Superpowers | | | | |
|--|---------|----------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Country | Economy | Military | Political Stability | Quality of Life |
| European Union | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| Russia | No | Yes | No | No |
| China | Yes | No | No | No |
| United States | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

8. Implications

While it is important to analyze the ability of each country to become the global superpower, it is also necessary to analyze the implications if any one country were to overthrow the United States from its current role. It appears unlikely that the European Union could overtake the United States as global hegemon. However, if it were capable, the world would most likely not look a whole lot different than it does today. Like the United States, the E.U. is a western power based on democracy and a capitalist economy. The overthrow would most likely be non-violent and the European Union would most likely cooperate with the United States as it has done for years as allies (Simms 2012). In fact, the E.U. as the global superpower would most likely stabilize peace (Bhutto 2012). From the United States' point of view, the European Union would be the most favorable country to emerge as a global superpower.

Russia, like the European Union, is unlikely to overthrow the United States as global hegemon. Russia does not have the economic strength to overthrow the United States by simply out producing. If it were to overthrow the United States, it would most likely be violent (Laqueur 2015). Conventional war would not favor Russia. As such, Russia would have to launch a nuclear campaign that catches the United States off guard. An era of Russian power would most likely be short lived as it would have to defend itself from the European Union and China as well. A Russian emergence as the global superpower would be the worst-case scenario for the United States. Luckily, this possibility seems the most unlikely.

China possesses the greatest ability to emerge as the next global superpower. Any challenge by China to the United States' current position will most likely be relatively peaceful. War between the two economic behemoths seems unlikely. Schweller (2011) believes that war between two great nuclear powers is unthinkable due to the destructiveness and economic damage that would be incurred by both nations. Instead, China would have to outmuscle the United States in a tense economic battle. China would need to win currency and trade wars with the United States (Subramanian 2011). However, if China were to win, this would signify a monumental shift in global economics. China would challenge the current western capitalist economic system. What exactly that means cannot yet be determined. However, it does not seem likely that China will attempt to isolate the United States, as the U.S. economy will continue to be important to that of China (Subramanian 2011). Now that each country has been analyzed and the implications of each attaining the status of superpower have been laid out, a reasonable conclusion can be made.

9. Conclusion

After analysis of all nations in contention to topple the United States as a global power, the European Union and Russia can be

dismissed. The European Union, while strong economically, does not have the military unity and might to project power as one would expect of a hegemon. There are also too many uncertainties going forward due to the Brexit vote and fragmented government system. Russia has the military power and geographical presence to contend as a global superpower. However, the country's citizens do not have the quality of life expected of a powerful nation. The country is also fraught with corruption and does not have a strong enough and diversified economy to qualify.

China can make the best claim as a threat to the United States as a hegemon. The country boasts a monster economy and a growing military. The quality of life and corruption raise questions about the country's ability to contend with the United States. Despite the world's largest GDP, the country can still be considered poor by GDP per capita standards. The Chinese economy also is too dependent on others to claim hegemony status. For the time being, and in the foreseeable future, it appears as if the United States holds onto the title of the world's global superpower. If China continues on its path of growth, reduces corruption, and focuses on advancing technology, there is certainly a chance the country could eventually stand par with the United States. Unless something drastically changes, it appears as if China's best chance would be to achieve a scenario of multi-polarity where the United States and China have equal power. That day appears to still be rather far away.

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